ESCAPADES OF A CLONE

MOHAN SUNDARA RAJAN

Illustrations

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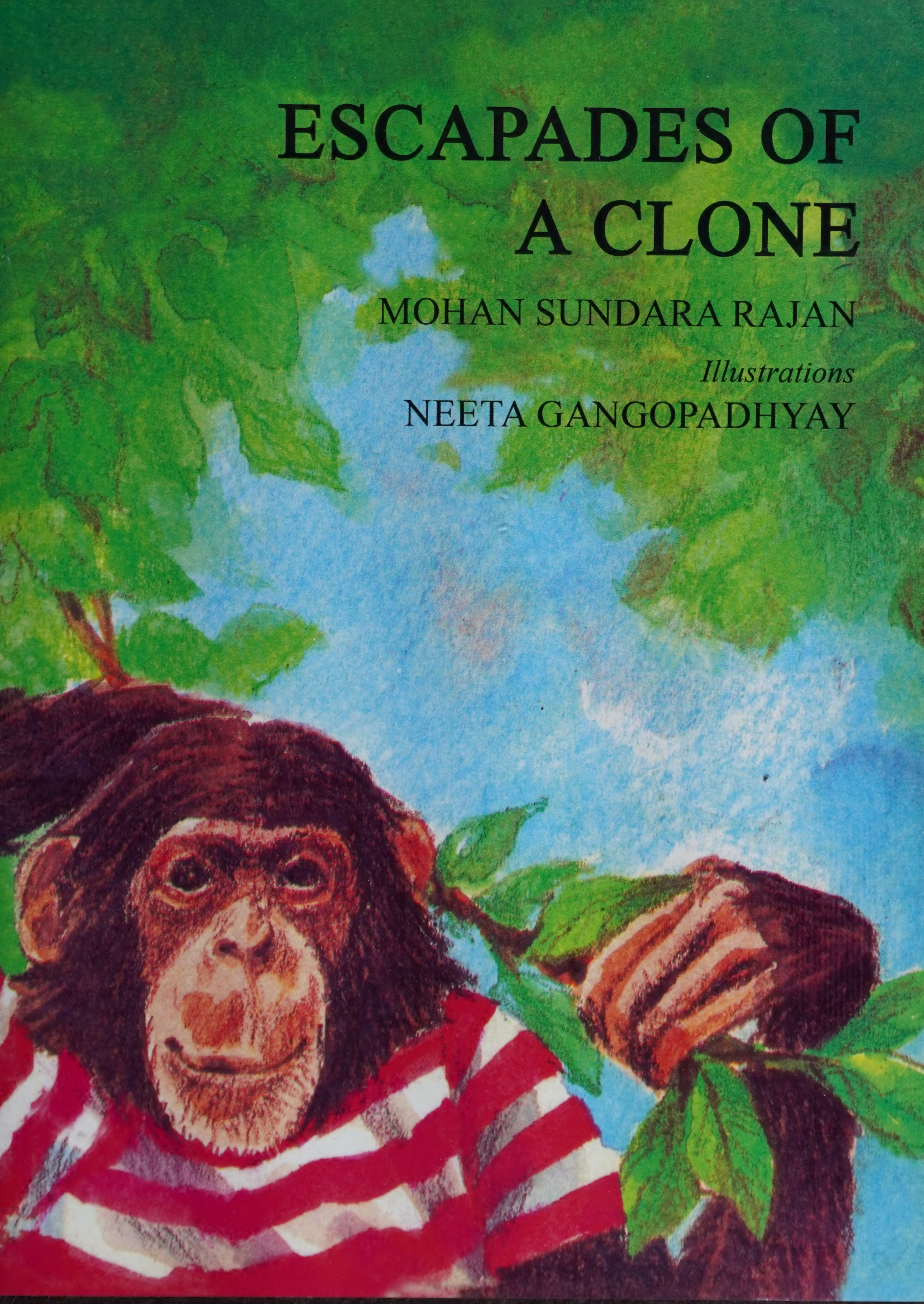

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Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

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1. A CHIMP CALLED CLONCHI

His ancestors were in Cameroon in West Africa. His cousins roamed freely in the wilds of neighbouring countries. He was known as the common chimpanzee.

His great grandfather was kept in chains. Luckily for him, a group of animal lovers bought him freedom. He eventually ended up in the Delhi zoo as a gift.

By then, his extended family was hunted down indiscriminately in many parts of Africa. His habitat—mostly humid forests—was increasingly destroyed. Moreover, the deadly AIDS virus was traced to his forefathers.

Fortunately, his children, born in captivity, escaped the virus. And his family was given special protection as an endangered species.

One of the children made news. His birth was not natural. He was cloned in a novel way. The nuclei from the skin cells of his mother were injected into the eggs of another female, modified for the purpose. He became a pet of a professor, called Chandra, well known as an animal lover. The Professor had a nice farm near Delhi. The pet had a wonderful time there; no experiments, no treadmill and no work. His only weakness was matchboxes; whenever he saw one, he lighted a fire!

Later on in 2046, the Professor decided to clone his pet. The year marked the golden jubilee of the world's first cloned sheep, Dolly. By then, cloning had become a routine procedure. It was possible to clone an animal using its ordinary cells, instead of those from its reproductive system, even from adult males. Moreover, the cells in an animal's body could be programmed to form any tissue or organ needed for fighting diseases or for making certain

hormones or for increasing the memory power of the cloned animal. The cloning of the adult chimp was quick and painless. The cloned chimp, also a male, was named Clonchi.

Clonchi perhaps had a perfect gene—a unit of heredity information—associated with memory and learning. He was therefore far ahead of his age in intelligence. Physically too, he was as strong as his 30-year old father right from his birth!

Prof. Chandra's friend, Bobo, a biologist, was a specialist in cloning. He too was an animal lover. He predicted a bright future for Clonchi, provided he reduced his weight!

Prof. Chandra took the suggestion seriously. He immediately

ordered a change of diet for Clonchi. No more bananas and nuts were given to him. Clonchi felt miserable. He thought he would get better food, when everyone wished the Professor a happy birthday! That day also, the same dull plate arrived. Clonchi decided to escape.

The Professor was a cricket fan. When a match was on, he would not turn away from television even for a minute. Clonchi had observed him closely. He got his chance when the Indian team was playing in the United Kingdom. He quickly jumped the fence and made his way to Bobo's house.

2. CLONE: NOT AN EXACT COPY

Bobo was surprised to see Clonchi at his doorstep. "Come in, dear," he said and offered him a drink.

Bobo telephoned Prof. Chandra and gave him the news. The Professor was taken aback. He said, "Clonchi was feeling miserable; may be because of his diet! Anyway, let him be with you for some time," and added, "You can take him as my gift! But Prof. Chandra warned, "Keep all matchsticks away from him, as his father could not resist lighting them!" Bobo said he would be careful and thanked the Professor for the gift.

Bobo soon found out that he had wrongly read Clonchi's weight in kilograms; it was in fact appropriate in pounds! He was relieved that he need not restrict Clonchi's diet.

Bobo introduced Clonchi to his colleagues, Kaku and his sister, Tina. The three were scientists who ran a business making cloned organs, synthetic genes and hormones for animals as well as humans.

Though Clonchi could not talk, he could count upto 20 and showed a vast array of gestures to convey what he wanted or liked. He had a sharp eye and soon became famous for his extraordinary memory. He was also good at mimicry. He frequently looked at himself in a mirror and made faces; and he was always aware of himself.

Clonchi enjoyed his freedom and unrestricted food! He was particularly fond of odd-shaped bananas, unlike the cloned variety which resembled test-tubes. Little did he know that the natural banana had been modified to include a protein to boost memory.

The banana worked wonders on Clonchi. He could remember as many as 30 objects presented to him for a thousandth of a second and later on press the corresponding buttons in the correct serial order. His alertness improved further. He became more cheerful and friendly. Surprisingly, he became allergic to matchboxes and fire. Whenever Bobo's friends smoked in his presence, Clonchi would try to snatch away the cigarette!

Bobo told Tina, "Clonchi is not an exact copy of his father. He is unique!"

Tina was worried about the continued availability of bananas. All the natural banana varieties in the world had disappeared following cloning experiments. Even the cloned variety was being hit by insects.

3. A SUPER SALE AND A SUPER SMELL!

Bobo's shop was in a lush, green area, full of coconut trees. It was famous for growing organs such as liver or kidney from the customer's own cells sent by them. The shop was well-linked to

national and international sales points by the Internet. Its website was known all over the world, especially among students. The products produced fantastic results. People just replaced many of their damaged organs with new ones. The pills made by the shop improved memory; others helped smokers give up; yet others curbed violent behaviour of people. Many relieved acute pain.

Bobo told his customers that there was no magic in what he sold. The pills worked by supplying selected genes of a person, or by replacing faulty ones. If only the ailment was correctly diagnosed, Bobo's shop would offer a cure. And the customers must specify the organs they need from their own cells with all the medical details and send the cells in vacuum-sealed boxes. As a result, many lives were saved and several improved. The new organs were not rejected by the body. The shop became internationally popular.

Clonchi was made in-charge of the cash counter. He always pressed the right button. The Internet sales window opened every day exactly at 6.00 a.m. Indian Standard Time and closed at 6.02 a.m. The day's stock was sold out in less than two minutes, mostly through e-mail orders. Everything was automatic, except the insertion of credit cards tendered in a few personal sales.

Tina spent her leisure time in photographing moving objects. Clonchi could not resist trying the camera. Tina gave him permission a couple of times to handle it. She soon found Clonchi doing very well in taking pictures. He could click at the right moment. Tina proposed to give him a camera as a birthday gift. A new camera was on sale to mark the centenary of the transistor in 2047.

Bobo was delighted. "Yes, let us get him the latest camera. But will Clonchi be able to handle the delicate instrument?"

Tina showed him some of the snaps taken by Clonchi and said he would certainly use it properly.

Clonchi got the latest model that looked like a credit card. It could capture even the briefest movement and print the image in less than a second. He developed the art of clicking at anything unusual or strange, without any hesitation.

Clonchi displayed another skill through his sense of smell. Once he sniffed at a person, he could identify him even after ten days. He could detect drug addicts and alcoholics accurately. His record in discovering dope in athletes became proverbial. His services were often required at athletic events and horse races. Athletes who had taken dope were mortally afraid of him!

4. CHASING A THIEF

Though computers answered the flood of queries on cloned products, Clonchi was trained to monitor the e-mail so that all mail was not opened indiscriminately as a safeguard against virus infection in computers. One morning, when Clonchi was busy with Internet queries, a shabbily dressed man walked upto the sales counter. Clonchi looked at him just once and took out a drug substitute, as he came near him. The man was delighted. Perhaps because he did not have to openly ask for a remedy. He said, "Thanks." Then suddenly he turned towards the clock and said it had stopped. Hardly had Clonchi turned his head towards the clock, when the man made a sudden dash to the door, holding a cassette he had lifted from the shop. The cassette gave numerous formulae for better health. It also served as a pass to wildlife sanctuaries.

Clonchi instinctively jumped out. The thief got into a van carrying gas cylinders and drove off. But Clonchi also leapt onto it, and hid himself behind the cylinders. The van sped towards a

jungle, which was a wildlife sanctuary for natural monkeys. The thief showed the stolen cassette to the guard and gained entry.

The van screeched to a halt. Clonchi got off quietly and climbed to the top of a nearby tree.

The intruder took out his mobile phone. He was talking to someone every now and then. Soon, a group of 20 people was at the gate. The intruder had meanwhile put on the uniform of a forest guard. He ordered the watchman to allow the group inside saying they were tourists and had special permission. He waved the cassette again at the guard. The group also got in.

Clonchi followed them hopping from tree to tree along the jungle trail. The group reached the dense forest where monkeys, particularly langurs and macaques lived. One of the group members took out a gun.

When Clonchi saw it, he pushed the danger button on his wrist watch, which sent a distress signal to Bobo. Such a signal automatically triggered the guidance control in Bobo's computer-watch,

displaying the exact location of the originating signal.

Bobo received the signal and did some more checking with a geographical positioning satellite. He identified the area from where Clonchi had sent the signal.

As Bobo was preparing to leave, he got a second signal from Clonchi. There was a coded message that the danger was from human intruders.

Clonchi sent a third message by pressing the relevant button. It announced the use of guns.

Bobo alerted the police and set off. "This is not a visitor's day," said the Police Chief, wondering how anyone was allowed inside.

Kaku, who accompanied Bobo, read out a newspaper report as they were driving. The report said a foreign drug company had financed a group of monkey catchers who were going about as nature tourists. The operation had started in the wake of reports of a revival of AIDS in some parts of the world, though the disease was virtually eradicated some years back. The drug company wanted natural monkeys for experiments with its new vaccine.

Bobo said, "We know we have enough cloned animals of these species. But we shall not allow anyone to take away our natural monkeys. Foreign drug companies had caught enough of them. They should now honour the international treaty to preserve the natural animals."

When the intruders saw scientists being allowed inside by saluting guards, they hid their guns and took out their camcorders, pretending to be tourists.

When Bobo told them it was not a visitor's day, they feigned ignorance. Clonchi jumped down as the intruders were about to leave and gave the photographs he had taken to Bobo. The snap clearly showed many of the intruders with guns taking a shot at the monkeys. The group was caught red-handed. Meanwhile, the police arrived and found the guns hidden by the visitors. The numbers on the gun were clearly visible in the photograph. The group was bundled off in a police van.

The thief with the cassette was still missing. Bobo said, "With the cassette, he can always enter the jungle."

5. TWO STRANGE ANIMALS

When Bobo and Kaku were discussing their next move, Clonchi came out of a dug-in cave nearby, holding a rabbit and a pig. Bobo observed some strange features of the animals. Neither had two ears. It was quite unnatural. Bobo immediately got in touch with his scientist colleagues. For, it might be the world's first rabbit and pig with just one ear.

Bobo wondered, "Could this be the result of someone playing with the genes of these animals or modifying their food genetically? I wonder if the cloned groundnut, potato, jowar and maize are safe to eat."

Tina said, "I get depressed whenever I see only green roses. You know there are no red roses at all nowadays. Somebody meddled by cloning the roses to produce them in many colours and ended up wiping out all the natural colours."

Tina continued: "Do you think someone has introduced the one-ear animals intentionally? I don't know. I believe that their plans must have misfired. What they thought was desirable must have become undesirable. We don't know what else has gone wrong with these animals, besides their ears!"

Bobo said, "You may be right, Tina. Remember, we cloned some big mice but they developed tumours too soon. It is true most of our genes are shared by other species in the animal kingdom. But I feel we should not upset the natural arrangements of genes in different species, just because we can now build any deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA, the molecule that contains genetic information."

Tina said, "I agree. We should take up this matter with the Watchdog Committee on Cloning; but I guess we may now release these animals here itself."

"Certainly," said Bobo. He asked Clonchi to record their unusual features. Clonchi clicked his camera promptly but before he could make them pose again, the animals had vanished into the cave.

6. A BOX OF GEMS OR GERMS?

Clonchi returned fast to the shop, hopping from tree to tree and jumping across gardens. He stopped for a while at a gas station and took out something from a car and ran back. He still reached Bobo's shop ahead of the scientists. He remembered that the Internet sales window should be kept open for an additional ten minutes that particular day for the benefit of buyers in different time zones.

Entry inside the shop counter was controlled by eye identification. Anyone who wanted to get in, when it was closed for business would look at a special keyhole on the door. A computer inside registered the pattern of the customer's iris. Entry would be allowed on human intervention for the first time, if authorised by the shopman. The door would thereafter open only if the iris of anyone entering the shop matched with its record.

Clonchi looked at the keyhole and the door opened promptly. No one was present inside. He was quick to notice an open computer window. Generally, all the windows remained shut. However, he started the sale and executed a series of orders from the United States.

When Clonchi finished the sale for the day on the Internet, a tall man was standing at the entrance. Clonchi authorised his entry behind the counter. The man offered fresh bananas. This was a strange gesture for Clonchi. Instinctively, he clicked his camera and recorded the man's face. He declined to accept the fruits anyway, for that was how he was trained.

The man then asked for a memory-booster mentioning its code. Strangely he ordered for boxes of different sizes, varying in the quantity of dosage. Clonchi patiently took out all the items and began processing his credit card.

Suddenly, the man walked out with a box. It was known as the precious gem box. Clonchi had been trained to act promptly in such situations. He pressed the numbers for the special police, called Bobo, Kaku and Tina, besides sounding an alert that transmitted the photo of the man's face to all airports, railway stations and highway mobile patrols.

Clonchi then posted a sign to indicate the theft, shut all computer windows and hopped onto his motorbike in pursuit of the intruder.

7. A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Bobo and Kaku returned to the shop. They were shocked to find the gem box missing. Bobo saw the bill still sticking out of the cash counter. He traced the credit card and phoned the company which had issued it. He was told that the card had been reported lost.

The telephone bell rang. It was from the Police Chief to enquire if Clonchi was in the shop. Bobo said, "No. He must be chasing someone who stole our gem box."

The Police Chief said: "Sir, our patrol saw a chimp take away something from a car parked for petrol, when the driver was away."

Bobo's face brightened. He now hoped to recover the gem box as it was very valuable to him.

But a second call from the police dashed his hopes. "We have caught three chimps, Sir," exclaimed the Police Chief and added, "One of them must be the thief who stole something from the car. Would you hurry to this place and identify if your chimp is among the three."

"Sure, we will," said Bobo and rushed out, saying, "There must be some mix-up. Clonchi would not do such things!"

He was however horrified to see Clonchi flanked by two other chimps, all lined up on suspicion. Clonchi invited Bobo to take something from him. Bobo was pleasantly surprised when he got the stolen cassette. He identified it as his own and told the police how it was stolen by a thief, whose fingerprints on the car matched those on the cassette. Clonchi must have taken it away from the thief in the petrol station on his way back from the jungle.

The Police Chief was glad that a chimp could be so helpful. Even during interrogation he had noticed that Clonchi was behaving differently. For instance, while the other chimps lost no time in plucking the peanuts from him, Clonchi sat there, brooding philosophically. Bobo told the Police Chief that Clonchi and all of them were in fact looking for another thief who got away with a gem box from his shop.

"You never told me that you deal with gems," said the Police Chief.

Bobo took him aside and whispered, "We call it a gem box but actually it is a germ box. Yes, it has the world's most dangerous germ or rather DNA of an extinct dinosaur in it. It should not be meddled with. That's why we are worried!"

The picture of the thief who stole the gem box was flashed repeatedly to all police stations and security check points. "We will get him," reassured the Police Chief, as they dispersed.

8. AN APPEAL FOR BLOOD

As Clonchi and the scientists were returning to their shop, a wireless message appealed for blood of a rare type. An old man was in the intensive care unit in the city hospital suffering from a blood clot. An immediate operation required blood that would prevent clotting.

Bobo knew that Clonchi had the right blood group demanded but was not sure if a cloned animal's blood would be accepted by a human.

"Why not?" exclaimed Tina, "If its organs can be transplanted, why not the blood?"

"We just cannot assume anything, Tina," said Bobo as they arrived at the hospital. "Anyway, let us see," he added.

At the hospital, a quick cross-check with the doctors revealed that they could try giving blood from Clonchi. Bobo then told Clonchi in sign language the requirement. Clonchi stretched out his hand without any fuss.

Until then, the identity of the patient was not known. After the operation was completed successfully, everyone waited for the patient to gain consciousness.

Bobo was surprised when he was told that the patient was none other than his friend, Prof. Chandra. Bobo was allowed to meet the Professor for a few minutes. The Professor informed Bobo that he got a heart attack when the watchman in his laboratory rang up to say an intruder had gone inside and locked himself in. The Professor softly whispered that he had been doing many sensitive experiments which, if not handled carefully, would do immense harm to the community.

Bobo gave it a thought for a while. The intruder was in fact seen by several people. Their description almost matched the thief who stole his gem box.

Bobo took leave of Prof. Chandra and instructed Kaku to rush to the laboratory at once. Kaku and Tina answered the phone but informed Bobo that Clonchi was missing.

When Clonchi was waiting outside the hospital ward, he got a call from the National Cycling Federation. They needed him right away to check the competitors for dope. It was by then well known

that Clonchi would smell any guy who had taken drugs to improve his performance.

Clonchi was given a grand treatment. He was escorted to the inaugural platform. He was garlanded and given nuts and cakes. Then the competitors were asked to parade before him. As they stood before him one by one, he sniffed at them as a dog would, but just for a second. He shook hands with only one person—a sure sign of instant disqualification of the athlete. But when Clonchi looked up, he was surprised to find that he was in fact the thief who stole the gem box. Before Clonchi could grab him, he bolted! But Clonchi took a photo of the thief without anyone noticing it.

Clonchi did not wait for the customary vote of thanks for his services. He just ran after the thief.

9. A DINOSAUR IN A MOSQUITO!

Bobo and his colleagues hastened to Prof. Chandra's laboratory. It was locked from inside. The intercom brought no reply. Time was running out. Bobo recalled the Professor's warning about the deadlines for some of the experiments, which may cause big explosions, unless attended to.

The police wanted to break open the door. Bobo pleaded with them not to do so, since the man inside was mad and he might very well destroy many things and inadvertently switch on lethal gases.

When they were unable to take any action, Clonchi arrived. He gave Bobo a photograph of the man whom he had disqualified. Bobo could spot the thief, though as a cyclist, he was sporting a moustache!

Clonchi, meanwhile, went round the laboratory. He pointed at an open ventilator and Bobo nodded his permission to place a camcorder on it. Clonchi easily went up the drain pipe and fixed a tiny camcorder with a Velcro strap. When Bobo switched on the projected image replayed by the camcorder, a shiver went down his spine.

The thief had unpacked the gem box only to find another box inside with a glass window. Bobo checked a number on the box and confirmed its contents. Preserved inside was a dead mosquito but it had sucked the blood of a dinosaur. Its DNA was still preserved in the mosquito and could be retrieved. Bobo's friend, Dr. Ram, a zoologist, told him that in fact, the DNA of several endangered animals had been preserved for possible reconstruction in the future. The dinosaur lying dormant in the mosquito blood once roamed as the deadliest beast on the Deccan Plateau. Dr. Ram telephoned to warn that unless one was very careful, the beast could be revived.

Tina recalled, "Well, haven't we learnt from *Jurassic Park*, that it took five years to assemble the DNA of 15 species of extinct reptiles. Now it may take only 5 hours!"

"It required scientists," interrupted Kaku. "But the mad man inside could still switch on some gene-reading machine."

Their conversation was drowned by a voice from inside the laboratory.

10. GECKO—THE SUPER COMPUTER

"This is Gecko," announced the voice. "I am the super computer in command here. Listen carefully. Press the green button on my left side to start me. Comply with my instructions; if you don't,

X-rays will be unleashed to kill you."

Even to others outside the laboratory, the message was frightening.

Tina explained that Gecko was named after a giant crested lizard, long thought to be extinct, that had been recently found in New Caledonia. It could vary its colour from brown to yellow to blue.

The scientists observed that the computer too changed colours in its indicator. It remained blue, when its tape announced that it was witnessing one of the most foolish acts! It could read the mood of the user and simulate the effects of facial muscles.

The thief said, "OK, I have pressed your green button. You, silly robot, now just keep quiet!"

Gecko resumed talking: "You are fooling around. You do not even know where the other switches are. I operate in nano seconds accurately. A nano second means one billionth of a second. Do you understand? Over." A label above its clock read 'Varies by one nano second every three billion years.'

The thief uttered, "I don't care!"

Gecko was an intelligent, interactive computer. It did not give up. It enquired, "Why are you here?"

The intruder pointed at the germ box and said, "It says 'deadly DNA', with a mosquito emblem on it. I can threaten people with it and get good ransom."

The computer asked, "Why do you need the money?" The thief became angry, "Do I have to answer you for everything? You silly machine! Don't you know what money can buy nowadays? I want a moped as advertised in TV. I want to ride at 200 km an hour!"

Gecko laughed. "Where on earth would you go at 200 kilometres an hour?" It asked and added, "It cannot be easily parked. You have to fold it and take it with you everytime you go inside a building. And it emits a foul smell. Many offices have banned it."

The intruder was confused. He just shrugged off the remark and said, "I don't care!"

He saw a tape and scissors behind the germ box. As he was about to take the tape, another message flashed, "Paste, not cut." The angry man read it wrongly as 'Paste not, cut!' He cut the last cover on the dead mosquito. A shrill noise arose from Gecko, which warned: "You mucked up. I said paste but you cut. Even a small mistake now will finish you. Just set the gene-reading machine to your left to the 'off' position and type 'ATZXYXATZ' a hundred times. If you make a single mistake, the germ in the box will take

on its real shape. It won't become just a loveable dinosaur. It will end up as a huge monster, multiply rapidly, kill almost all animals, more than what it needs. And the waste will lead to new insects, which would destroy the only variety of paddy crop now left in the world." After a pause, Gecko's voice became louder: "I cannot allow it. Get the hell out of here, now!" It thundered.

Outside Bobo recalled the warning of some agronomists that since genetic modifications of crops began, all except one variety of paddy, had fallen prey to insects.

Bobo said, "The world was precariously depending on just one variety of paddy. If that too gets knocked off, then millions would go without their staple food."

Bobo and his colleagues watched the scene from outside with bated breath. Clonchi suddenly shrieked and pointed out to an image of a skeleton resembling a dinosaur emerging from near the computer.

Bobo flashed the news on the Internet. Scientists from Japan, USA and Germany were jolted into action. They joined their Indian colleagues in an immediate analysis of the threat.

Tina mumbled: "I know, something like this was inevitable, after they had completed the human genome project and identified all the human genes. A biological weapon is now possible. There may be no remedy to overpower a monster that may emerge and come out any moment, despite the computer's attempt to prevent it."

Scientists from Germany predicted the worst. They feared that the monster could also re-activate all the dangerous organisms stored in laboratories. Diseases that were eradicated long ago may break out once again.

The intruder switched off the power inside. He refused to follow the instructions of Gecko. The skeleton appeared bigger and bigger with a fierce look.

A flash message from computer research centre assured them that if the intruder left the laboratory, the skeleton image would disappear. It was an optical illusion.

"But how to chase the intruder out," exclaimed Tina in despair.

Clonchi thrust the identity card of the man inside into Tina's hands. He had retrieved it while returning from the sports podium.

The ID card had some family details of the man and his address. He had a five-year old daughter.

Kaku devised a plan. He rushed to meet the man's daughter. He told her that her father was in danger and that she could perhaps save him by recording an appeal in her own voice urging him to come out. Kaku assured her that no harm would come to her father. "We are now interested in saving the world, not just your father," he commented with grave concern.

The girl agreed and Kaku hurried back to play the message. The natural voice of his daughter did the trick a machine couldn't.

All the thief's bravado vanished. He simply dropped his plans and made his way to the exit.

As he rushed out, he lit a fire, hoping nobody else would be able to get inside the laboratory. Clonchi, who was allergic to fire, jumped in, poured a bucket of sand and extinguished it. The intruder escaped in the commotion that ensued.

11. A RIDICULOUS DEMAND

The man headed straight to his house and locked himself in. He was angry to hear from his daughter of the ploy devised to get him out. In a vindictive tone he said, "They got me out with the help of my little daughter. This time I shall see that a girl would make it impossible for them to get in!"

He posted a message on the door which read: 'This door will open only if the computer code given here is read out in front of it by a girl who is a zoology student, 181 centimetres tall and weighs 50 kg!'

Bobo and Kaku wanted to catch him as they were not sure whether he had left the gem box inside the laboratory. They reached his house and read the message on the door.

Bobo laughed, "Look at this ridiculous demand," he stated.

Kaku was serious. "How does one find a girl who is 181 cm tall and weighs exactly 50 kg?" he fumed.

Tina was sarcastic. "Even to open a door, he wants a zoology student!"

But there was no other way than to search on the Internet. After an exhaustive scanning of thousands of lists, a girl student

was located in Kanyakumari in a school overlooking the Vivekananda Rock monument, but her weight was not confirmed. Bobo, Tina and Clonchi immediately flew to Kanyakumari and met the headmaster of the school.

The headmaster confirmed that there was a tall girl but he would not know her height or weight accurately. "In any case, the school is famous for undernourished and underweight students, especially girls," he added.

Bobo said, "It does not matter. Show us the girl and we would talk to her parents. We will give her special meals and vitamins, if needed."

The very next day, Bobo and Tina visited the school. Surprisingly they found only boys.

12. NO MILK FOR GIRLS

"Where are the girls?" asked Tina. The headmaster took her aside and whispered. "They are all on strike. They too are demanding special milk as given to the boys."

"I don't follow. What is the problem, Sir," asked Bobo.

The headmaster explained, "The milk is from a rare breed of Newzealand cows. They secrete a protein in their milk. This improves memory. Our students just love it before examinations. But the contractor failed to supply the required quantity saying that he had only two cows. Perhaps he sells it outside. It was therefore decided to serve milk only to boys as they were less in number. As a result, the girls are no longer attending school."

Bobo nodded his head in disagreement. "What a shame!" He murmured and questioned the headmaster, "Has anyone verified

the contractor's plea of inadequate number of cows?"

"Not to my knowledge," replied the headmaster.

Bobo asked Tina to visit the farm without warning and take Clonchi with her.

Tina slipped into the farm and surprised the contractor. However, she came across only two cows. As she was about to leave, she saw Clonchi on a haystack. The chimp had detected some movement under the haystack and when he prodded it with a stick, a cow trotted out. Clonchi then jumped onto other haystacks and uncovered five more cows. The contractor was exposed. He broke down and explained how he was under pressure from his bosses to reduce the supply to the school.

Tina assured him that no harm would come his way, if he resumed full supply forthwith. The contractor agreed and did a prolonged *namaste* not only to Tina but to Clonchi as well. Clonchi in turn folded his hands, much to the delight of the contractor's children.

Soon, word went round the village that all girl students would be given special milk from the very next day.

Bobo was happy to see the response. The attendance was cent per cent on the ensuing day. He also identified the girl only to discover that she was 0.1 millimetre shorter than required and five kg leaner!

Bobo was worried. He did not know how to increase her height and weight in the shortest possible time. He got in touch with nutrition experts in Hyderabad. He sent her medical report to them on the Internet.

Soon there was good news. The nutrition advisers indicated that certain special hormone-based pills were available. They could be tried along with a special diet for 30 days.

The girl was eager to accept the challenge, though she was

hesitant of putting on weight. Tina assured her of a corrective tonic. She promised her a job. Her mother was reluctant. Her daughter might become lethargic and prone to diseases if she went on gaining weight. But after hours of persuasion, she agreed.

With the best of cloned growth hormones available, it was clarified that it would take one week for the girl to grow 0.1 millimetre taller.

The hormones worked better than expected. Bobo took the girl to the locked house. He ensured that she fulfilled all the conditions displayed in the computer code. The message was simple but the name of an animal mentioned was not clear. However, as

the girl was a good zoology student, she had no problem in reading it correctly as *Seismosaurus*, which she described as one of the largest dinosaurs that ever lived.

The moment the correct code was read, the massive door opened smoothly. The man switched off all lights and came out in the dark. But Clonchi smelt him. He caught hold of his belt and announced his catch. The police finally took over. The scientists heaved a sigh of relief, as there was no gem box with him.

While everyone was congratulating Clonchi, Tina thrust a gift into the hands of the girl student.

13. CLONCHI IN TROUBLE

Next day, Clonchi was again missing. The headmaster came running.

"Sir, the chimp is in trouble. He had played havoc in the school when we had our Parent's Day."

Bobo and his colleagues did not wait for further details. They dashed to the school.

On the way, the headmaster narrated what happened. Clonchi had visited the school when the students were rehearsing the march-past on the Parent's Day. He observed that a few students were out of step. Clonchi instinctively took out his mini scanner—which resembled a thermometer—and held it near the boys as they passed the saluting base. The results were automatically printed in the school computer, as Clonchi forgot to switch on the storage-only button.

The print-out published in the Parent's Day magazine was disturbing. It displayed the students in two groups, one normal

and another drug-prone! This was shocking, as none of the students ever took any drug. A footnote explained that though the students were normal, their genetic make-up revealed a tendency towards addiction after the age of 20.

Bobo saw Clonchi being surrounded by the boys. "How can a mere chimp call us drug-addicts?" They demanded angrily. "There could be some jealous guys trying to paint us black using this animal," they said.

There were shouts of 'down with cloning'. A student declared, "Today would be the end of this silly animal, made much of by the Press and TV."

Bobo and Tina appealed for calm. "The chimp's scanning only indicates a future possibility," they explained. "In fact, it helps; one can take precautions. We agree that it should not have been made public and we apologise for it."

But the students would hear none of the arguments. "Either you agree to lock him up in a zoo for ever or we shall send him to

the circus, where he can try his tricks," said one of the moderate students. Some others demanded that the chimp be banished from the country.

When cornered, Clonchi knew what to do. He pressed the panic button to get VIP assistance. The call for help was received at the highest quarters including the Chief of Wildlife Association. One of the professors who heard the call was Prof. Chandra himself.

He got an update of the situation and decided to face it. He was told that the boys were ardent cricket fans and would do anything in the name of cricket. But they were adamant about holding Clonchi.

The Professor arrived in the school accompanied by a cricket star. The students almost lifted their siege off Clonchi on seeing the star and flocked to seek his autograph. The cricketer appealed to the students to free the chimp and not be obsessed with ideas of punishment, saying, "Obsession itself is a symptom of addiction."

The appeal worked.

14. A PROFESSOR REGRETS

Bobo and his colleagues thanked Professor Chandra and the cricketer for saving Clonchi. The scientists narrated to the Professor how a dangerous experiment was attempted in his laboratory and they almost saw visions of dinosaurs emerging. Prof. Chandra assured them that they were only images created by his computer to warn people not to undertake cloning experiments that would go out of control.

He was relieved to know that the laboratory was not gutted. "Bobo told me how the presence of mind of Clonchi helped them put out the fire," he said.

"That's strange," said the Professor. "His father was just the opposite. He lighted fires, wherever he found a matchbox."

"No, Professor. Clonchi is very different. He is a very helpful and a lovable companion," said Tina.

Bobo disclosed that it was Clonchi who donated blood to Prof. Chandra. The Professor was overwhelmed.

Bobo said, "Well, Professor, I am not an expert in biology but one thing is clear. The escapades of Clonchi have shown that the cloned animal is not a robot, not even an identical twin. He does not seem to be just a sum of genes and the environment, but perhaps the product of a constant interplay between them."

Prof. Chandra said, "You are right," and exclaimed, "What a mistaken view I had about Clonchi. I feel I should have taken him back from you the day he escaped from me. I regret denying him his favourite food, just because we read his weight wrongly."

Bobo and others were moved by the words of regret by a top Professor. Bobo said, "Well, Professor, it is nice of you to say all this. But I do feel Clonchi deserves due recognition. I wonder how we could show our admiration to him."

"Sure, I agree with you. If you permit me, I shall have Clonchi as my guest for a month. I would like to give him all his favourite nuts and fruits and allow him to play in my garden with my grandchildren."

Bobo readily agreed. But Tina found Clonchi rather unwilling to go away from them. It was difficult to convince the chimp that he would be away only for a short while. After an elaborate sign language and video shows of the Professor's house, his gardens and grandchildren, Tina was able to persuade Clonchi to go with Prof. Chandra.

Clonchi was allowed to carry with him his favourite camera with all the pictures he had taken and his wristwatch, which also functioned as a transmitter and location-finder.

15. CLONCHI AMONG ROBOTS

It was a nice home-coming for Clonchi. There were, however, a few new gadgets which attracted his attention.

One was a fridge with a variety of functions. Whenever he took out a drink or peanut packet, it was replaced! The fridge was always full. And there was a 'score board', which showed the number of bottles and packets taken out! He opened the fridge almost every half hour and helped himself to a variety of food, fruit and nuts.

The toilet was another high-tech attraction. He was a little embarrassed to see some numbers changing whenever he used the toilet. He did not know that the waste was being analysed in real time and the results displayed. When he tried to open the toilet door from inside, he couldn't come out! A pack of pills was placed in front of him in a tray of the door and a sign flickered a gesture to indicate 'TAKE PILLS TO OPEN DOOR'. He swallowed the pills though he couldn't read the sign and the door opened. Perhaps, he was treated for possible indigestion, hinted by the computer.

When he went to sleep, the lights automatically dimmed and came again as he woke up. A gadget nearby showed some graphs, perhaps registering his dreams. There was also a snore card in a cassette. He played it back and heard his own snoring loud and clear.

At the computer, he could wear special spectacles and experience a virtual forest and a play with natural chimps.

In the real garden, he could climb tall trees and swing from one branch to another, much to the delight of the Professor's grandchildren.

In the last week of his stay with Prof. Chandra, Clonchi could

not resist his curiosity to visit his laboratory. He was always turned back from the laboratory. One day, when the door was open, he got in.

Clonchi was simply amazed by the sophisticated computers, all working without a stop. He was attracted by a green sign from a computer. It said, 'INSERT PHOTO OR FLOPPY' and showed the sign in a simple diagram. Clonchi could not resist inserting the photographs he had taken in the jungle long ago. He pushed the photos inside.

He heard strange sounds, as if a thousand keyboards were being worked simultaneously. A gallery of consoles displayed a variety of messages. Several tapes rolled out. Floppies were ejected and print-outs emerged smoothly.

Prof. Chandra, who was on his evening walk nearby, heard the computer sound the alarm. He rushed in. He was surprised to find Clonchi inside. But he was not angry with him. His attention was diverted by the messages.

He was horrified by the print-out. The computer had analysed the photo of the rabbit and pig taken by Clonchi in the jungle. Over a hundred analysts in India and abroad had already studied the abnormal features of the animals, which had only one ear. The findings about their immune systems were alarming. Apparently, the animals could not stand even one rain! It was also discovered that the rabbits and pigs were born deformed after their parents were given genetically modified food. The butterflies died after smelling the groundnut crop which had been modified to include an insecticide. The built-in insect killer could not discriminate between friend and foe. The bees died whenever they flew near green roses.

A related finding was even more alarming. The antibiotic resistance genes used in the modified groundnut crop played havoc

with humans too. Those who took groundnut oil and the new potatoes had no use for antibiotic medicines. Moreoever, people of all ages suffered a sharp decline in their memory and everyday life became a nightmare. School children forgot their way back home. Executives forgot their car numbers. And women added salt repeatedly while cooking food.

Prof. Chandra realised that the problem should be posed to the entire international scientific community. He spread the findings far and wide. His website was soon flooded with messages of concern and further queries. However, some drug companies and potato chip makers threatened to kill him!

16. A YOGI IN THE HIMALAYAS

No foreign computer system or scientist offered any solution. The answer came from India's own computer, Param 10,000, in Hyderabad.

The first print-out was cryptic: "Solution suggested: Local plant in Himalayas."

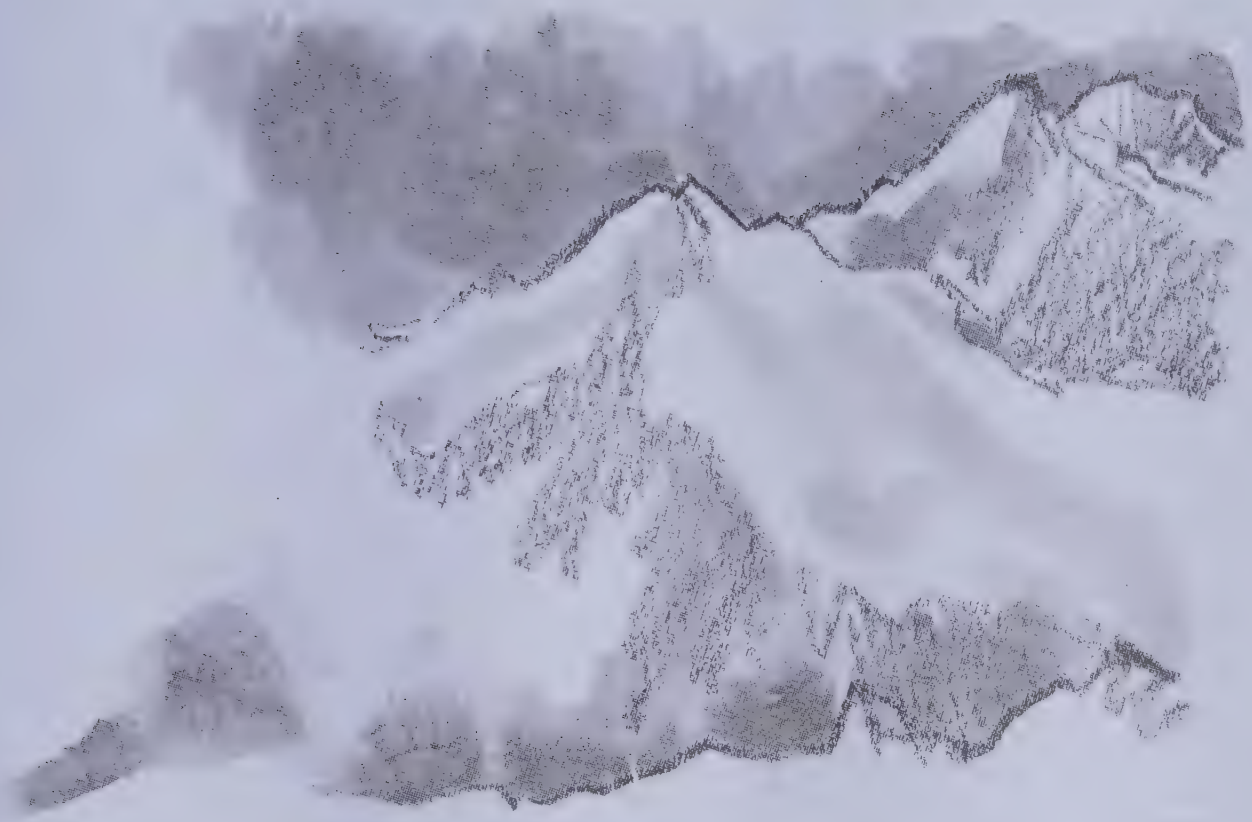
When asked to amplify, Param detailed: "Step one: Herb, not named, available in the Himalayas.

Step two: Visit a Yogi in the Himalayas at the given coordinates. No phone or fax, please.

Step three: Permission to be given on personal request.

Caution: No helicopter allowed in the area of the *ashram*. Parachute landing is also prohibited."

Prof. Chandra and Bobo fed the coordinates of the *ashram* into their own computer. They also obtained an Indian satellite imagery of the Himalayan region from the National Remote Sensing Agency,



Hyderabad within a few minutes.

When the imagery was seen with the geographical coordinates, the true dimensions of the area were visible. It was a breath-taking scene, halfway to Mount Everest. But one had to leap across a steep gorge flanked by two peaks to reach the area. Even a small slip could be fatal. And the terrain was such that any hard landing would break the snow and widen the gap further.

The scientists went into a closed door session. They emerged smiling. Clonchi was their unanimous choice to solve the problem. He can be trained to improve his long-jump record with less oxygen.

A simulated valley with peaks was set up. Clonchi increasingly covered more and more distance in long jumps. In a week, he had mastered the art of leaping across yawning gaps in bitter cold.

17. A SUPERB JUMP

An expedition to Mount Everest was about to begin. The leader of the expedition agreed to guide Clonchi upto a point from their base camp. Bobo convinced him that Clonchi was capable of going on the right path, once he was on his own.

Four days of trekking from the base camp took the expedition to a point where Clonchi had to part company. The expedition leader was quite impressed with the disciplined behaviour of Clonchi. After checking the coordinates and the location-fixer on Clonchi's waist, the expedition members took leave of him.

Bobo was tracking him throughout. Twice a day, Clonchi had to read out his location. Clonchi, however, had a field day with his camera. He had to be restrained at one point, for he was slowing down while taking pictures.

At the point of the leap, Clonchi was asked to unfurl a plastic tape and measure the distance to the other side. It was confirmed that the distance was well within Clonchi's capacity. Clonchi was asked to practise the jump on land a couple of times. Each time the distance covered increased. "Close your eyes; do not look down the abyss," warned Tina. Bobo gave him the permission after a final check. The countdown was nearing its end. "Three, two, one, zero... jump off," instructed Clonchi's trainer.

It was a superb jump. Clonchi soft landed on the other side where hardly anyone had gone. Everyone, who had been watching him at the control room, applauded.

When he reached the caves after trekking a few kilometres, Clonchi was confused. There were several caves. All looked alike. Clonchi could not identify the cave that would lead him to the Yogi's *ashram*.

Bobo radioed him to play devotional music on his cassette loudly and stop if the Yogi appeared. Clonchi switched on his mini cassette player and played a song of invocation. It reverberated in the mountains. The Yogi came out. He was surprised to see a chimp in that lonely place. Clonchi folded his hands as if to say *namaste* and placed flowers and a cassette player at his feet and switched it on. The Yogi was amazed. He heard the message and understood the mission. He blessed the chimp and gave him a fruit. Clonchi accepted it in both hands but did not eat it immediately.

Clonchi was asked to rest for the day. And the Yogi went into his cave for meditation.

18. THE JOKE TEST

Next day, the Yogi summoned Clonchi. A transmitter was fixed and the Yogi asked Bobo to arrange for a talk-back session with the children and others who had memory problems. Bobo had good contacts with the Indian Space Research Organisation. A two-way video link was immediately arranged through a domestic satellite.

The Yogi began his session with a joke. "Half of what I am going to say is not correct. But I do not know which half it is!" He said and paused.

Only one student laughed. Another asked him a formula to detect the correct half! The rest sat dumb-founded.

The Yogi said only *Pranayama* could restore their memory power. "It would also make you laugh easily," he added and demonstrated it by breathing in and out through one nostril at a time alternately. He said, "The two halves of our brain will do their work with better coordination if *Pranayama* is practised regularly!"

The Yogi then informed Bobo that he would be sending through Clonchi a bundle of rare herbs selected by him. "They should be cultivated before sowing any seeds. The herb would prepare the soil and remove all toxins. Then the usual potato or maize could be cultivated."

The Yogi continued after a pause, "Genes are not everything. As you know, most of the DNA in humans does not code for genes at all. You have to learn a lot still. Keep on trying to use cloning for alleviating human suffering, not for cloning another human being. Remember, a clone is still subject to the influence of the environment. Be cautious, the so-called gene for improvement may produce unexpected and undesirable results."

The live video showed Clonchi receiving the herbs from the Yogi and retreating slowly from the *ashram*.

19. A HERO'S WELCOME

Clonchi returned to a hero's welcome. Bobo and the entire township were awaiting his arrival. Even the boys who roughed up Clonchi were there, hoping to get some ideas on improving their memory. They were tired of reading the same lessons again and again. Clonchi was greeted with garlands. Sweets were distributed.

Bobo and his colleagues supervised the planting of the herbs. A special police force stood guard around the fields. When a sizeable stock of herbs was built up, the cultivation of groundnut, jowar and maize was authorised.

The crops came up very well. People gradually recovered their normal memory. Swarms of butterflies and bees appeared after a long time. Their gentle encounters with the groundnut crop and green roses did not harm them. Rabbits and pigs, who ate the farm products, gave birth to normal offspring. An animal with a single ear again became a rarity.

Bobo and the farmers were quite pleased with the results. The farmers asked Bobo to give the choicest bananas to Clonchi, who made it all possible.

20. THE FINAL ESCAPADE

A message from the Yogi awaited Bobo. It was in reply to Bobo's final report on the harvest and animals. The Yogi assured the scientist of his continued guidance. However, he was rather distressed to hear of reports that cloning of humans was underway resulting in the birth of deformed children.

Bobo clarified that no such effort was being made in India. He assured the Yogi that he would take up the matter with the international scientific community.

The Yogi said, "Even if some others try human cloning, just tell them that the clones could not be cent per cent copies of the original." He pointed out, "Well, Clonchi too has only 98 per cent of the human DNA; but there is nothing wrong in it."

Concluding, the Yogi said he had a personal request to make and hoped it would be granted.

Bobo and others wondered what could a Yogi desire from them.

The Yogi made his request. "I want Clonchi to stay with me!"

Bobo and his colleagues were shocked. They were not prepared for such a request. They could not imagine being without Clonchi.

The Yogi continued: "I could well imagine your dilemma. You love Clonchi but you respect me too. And my request is really in the interest of Clonchi. When I observed him here, I was convinced that his breathing was far from normal. The pollution in your cities

has ruined his lungs. Already he has inherited the same wear and tear suffered by his 30-year old father. I want to prolong his life. Being a clone, he would do well even outside his normal habitat. The mountain air and the special fruits and herbs here would make him better. Above all, I need a companion who does not talk back!"

Bobo was still confused. He begged the Yogi to give him some time to consider the request.

Bobo convened a meeting of all the concerned scientists and animal lovers on the Internet. Clonchi's escapades had created a worldwide interest. A record number of people from different countries participated in the on-line meeting.

Kaku pointed out that Clonchi had escaped many times but mainly to catch wrong-doers. It was time to allow him to escape from pollution and human problems once for all. He deserved a new life.

Following a lengthy debate, it was agreed to send Clonchi, but after replacing one of his lungs with a new one, grown out of his own body cells. It was pointed out that the impact of cloning could be better studied, if Clonchi lived long without disease.

Tina was in tears, but Bobo consoled her saying, "Do you want a Clonchi with a short and miserable life here or a Clonchi with a long and happy life there?" The question settled the issue.

A small tissue of cells from Clonchi's hand was taken out. It was successfully grown into a lung and implanted into Clonchi. But it was a challenge to make Clonchi understand that he would again go to the Himalayas and would not return. In a communication session spread over four days, Bobo succeeded in informing him of the decision of the world's scientific community. He told his colleagues, "In the interest of science, they had to ignore their personal likes and dislikes."

Bobo, Kaku and Tina led the long line of admirers gathered to

bid farewell to Clonchi at the helipad. Although helicopters were prohibited near the *ashram*, the Yogi gave permission for the sake of Clonchi. Baskets of sweets and bananas were loaded onto the helicopter. Tina gave him a special woollen pullover. The Mayor sent him an overcoat and a bouquet.

With folded hands, Clonchi took leave of all and boarded the helicopter.

"No more escapades, Clonchi," said Bobo. "Err...rr," giggled Clonchi. The entire gathering raised their hands and shouted, "Best of luck," as the helicopter took off.

That evening Tina received a call from Prof. Chandra. He said, "I am sure you are depressed as Clonchi is no longer with you. But I have some news for you. I have preserved some of his skin cells. We can always clone another."

Tina said, "Thank you, Professor, certainly we can have another cloned chimp but I wonder if there will be another Clonchi!"

The Professor nodded his head in agreement and said, "I appreciate what you are saying, we can clone an animal. But we are not sure if we could reproduce one which displays love and respect."

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